

western News Feb 20, 02

EPA smooths over concerns raised by Siefkes, says Peronard

By ROGER MORRIS

Western News Publisher

Most of the concerns raised by Ray and Trudy Siefke concerning cleanup at their home south of Libby will be taken care of with existing personnel, said Paul Peronard, on site coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency, during the Community Advisory Group meeting Thursday night.

Peronard said he met with the Siefkes on Thursday to discuss unfinished repairs to their home following cleanup of asbestos contaminated vermiculite last fall. The couple are upset about damages done to their home and personal belongings during cleanup.

The Siefkes' house didn't have vermiculite insulation but

they tracked the contaminated material into their home from the surrounding property. It accumulated over time on their lot from equipment purchased from the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine.

Peronard said his planned meeting with the Siefkes was cancelled in December because of the meeting between Grace officials and EPA representatives in Washington, D.C.

The EPA had planned on fixing damages when a contractor responded to finish work on the surrounding yard this spring.

"I think we got it behind us," Peronard told the CAG. "It won't be the last time a homeowner will be unhappy. There will be more."

"What you can expect is we will resolve it more quickly."

Most of the details of residential and commercial cleanup will be taken care of in a pre-work agreement signed ahead of time, Peronard said.

The Siefkes were out of their home for nearly three months while the grounds and home were cleaned but Peronard doesn't anticipate homeowners to be displaced as long when insulation is removed.

The length of time will depend on the type of construction and condition of the home but he estimated about a week. Alternate housing for

the homeowner would be paid by the EPA.

The EPA will replace the vermiculite insulation taken out with either blown fiberglass or fiberglass batts.

"The general theme is whatever we take out we replace in like value," he said.

The EPA is in the process of listing the Libby community as a Superfund site for removal of vermiculite. Thus far, vermiculite ore or tailings, with asbestos levels ranging from trace amounts to percentages in double figures, have been removed from numerous yards, the playground area near Plummer School, beneath the Libby High School and Libby Middle School tracks and from the sites of the former export and sorting plants for the mining operation.

In addition, the EPA is proposing a health emergency declaration, which would give them the authority to remove vermiculite insulation "Zonolite" from area buildings.

Peronard has estimated that Zonolite was used in 70 percent of the homes within the Libby city area with a drop off to about 20 percent in the county. That represents about 800 homes with the cost running from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per home.

"I can see it going up to \$20,000 in some of the houses we have looked at," he said.